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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001957

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SUBJECT: TURKEY/SUDAN: PM ERDOGAN TO ARAB LEAGUE SUMMIT AND
TURKISH AID TO DARFUR

REF: ANKARA 1570

Classified By: DCM Nancy McEldowney for Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

Summary

¶1. (C) In a first for Turkey, PM Erdogan was invited to address the March 28-29 Arab League Summit in Khartoum on the Alliance of Civilizations. The GOT sees greater cooperation with the AL as a useful tool for helping to mediate regional disputes and increasing trade. Erdogan discussed increased Turkish economic and development support for Sudan with Sudanese leaders, including First Vice President Kiir, and personally delivered a planeload of humanitarian supplies to a South Darfur camp. Five more Turkish C-130s with humanitarian aid left for Nyala on April 7. Turkey also seeks a higher profile in Africa to enhance its bid for a 2009-2019 seat on the UN Security Council. End Summary

Turkey and the Arab League

¶2. (C) MFA Middle East Department Head Sedat Onal told us April 5 that Erdogan was the first Turkish head of government to be invited to an Arab League Summit. Following in the footsteps of Alliance of Civilizations co-founder Spanish PM Moratinos, who addressed the 2005 AL summit in Algiers, Erdogan traveled to Khartoum March 29 to speak on Turkey's vision for avoiding a "clash of civilizations." Erdogan met briefly with Syrian President Bashar Assad as well as Lebanese leaders Siniora and Lahoud on the margins of the summit, but discussed little of substance, according to Onal.

Erdogan discussed the urgent need for formation of an Iraqi government with UN officials attending the summit and met briefly with PA President Abbas, whom he invited to visit Turkey in late April.

¶3. (C) Onal explained that no formal mechanism exists to give Turkey observer status in the AL. However, the Turkish Foreign Ministry has signed an MOU with the AL Secretary General to promote more regular contact. This MOU will be reviewed shortly the Turkish Grand National Assembly, Onal said, adding that the Russian and China have similar arrangements with the AL. Onal acknowledged the AL's limitations, but

said Turkey sees greater contact as potentially useful on specific issues, to include encouraging more Arab support to Iraq, facilitating Turkey's desire to help mediate regional disputes, and increasing trade.

Turkey and Sudan: Trade and Aid

¶4. (C) MFA Africa Department Head Raif Karaca told us April 7 that Erdogan's trip to Sudan was originally focused on the Arab League summit, but gradually took on a bilateral character. While in Khartoum, the Prime Minister met separately with President al Bashir as well as First VP Kiir and VP Taha. In discussion of the Sudanese conflict, Erdogan stressed that Turkey wants a solution acceptable to both sides which respects Sudanese territorial integrity. In this context, Karaca noted that Turkey complies with UN and more restrictive EU policies limiting arms transfers to Sudan, and recently blocked a shipment of handguns from Turkey that appeared destined for Sudan through shady middlemen.

¶5. (C) Economic issues were reportedly at the forefront, with Sudan expressing dissatisfaction with Chinese, Indian and Malaysian investment in Sudan's energy sector. Sudanese leaders urged greater Turkish involvement there and in infrastructure (especially water and irrigation) projects. While in Khartoum, Erdogan signed an agreement to open an office of Turkey's Foreign Development Agency (TIKA) in Sudan. Karaca reported that, with some 2700 Turkish nationals currently working in Sudan, Turkey is also considering expanding its modest diplomatic presence in

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Khartoum.

¶6. (U) Karaca explained that Turkish interest in Africa stems from GOT initiatives begun in the context of the GOT's "Year of Africa" in 2005. That year PM Erdogan visited Ethiopia and South Africa, and Turkey gained observer status in the African Union. Turkish Airlines inaugurated flights to Addis Ababa and Khartoum in 2005 as well. The GOT is looking to open TIKA offices elsewhere in Africa.

¶7. (C) Karaca admitted another motive behind Turkey's growing involvement in Africa -- the GOT hopes to drum up support for its bid for a UNSC seat in 2009-2010 by playing a higher profile role on the continent.

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Erdogan Visits Darfur with Aid, More on the Way
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¶8. (SBU) Karaca said that Erdogan visited a refugee camp in South Darfur, near Nyala, and oversaw the distribution of a planeload of Turkish humanitarian supplies. Seeing a need for additional aid at the Red Crescent-run tent city he visited, Erdogan immediately called on TIKA to prepare additional planeloads of humanitarian supplies. Karaca informed us that, as of April 7, Turkey had dispatched five additional Turkish C-130s to Nyala with additional medical supplies and baby food. Karaca explained that Sudanese authorities had prevailed upon Erdogan to limit his visit to a pro-government camp near Nyala by insisting that visiting a camp in West Darfur would be too dangerous.

Mixed Press Coverage

¶9. (SBU) Press coverage of the visit was mixed, with several editorials criticizing Erdogan for going to the AL Summit while relations with the EU and U.S. remained unsteady. One influential columnist questioned Erdogan's alleged assertion that there had been no genocide or ethnic assimilation in

Darfur. Other news outlets reported positively on Erdogan's visit to Darfur and the distribution of Turkish humanitarian supplies there.

Comment

¶10. (C) We see the bilateral portion of this visit as positive. We had urged Erdogan's staff to ensure that he met with First VP Kiir and visited Darfur while in Sudan (reftel). Turkish humanitarian aid is also welcome, even if it appears destined exclusively for pro-government camps in South Darfur. Erdogan's Arab League appearance reflects his Justice and Development Party (AKP) government's desire to reach out more to the Muslim world. End Comment.

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